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Vázquez, Gabino

The agrarian reform in
Lower California

[Mexico, D.F.]

[1936?]

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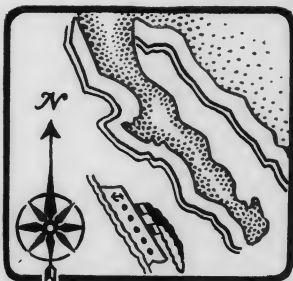
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THE AGRARIAN REFORM IN LOWER CALIFORNIA

LECTURE BY
DR. GABINO VAZQUEZ



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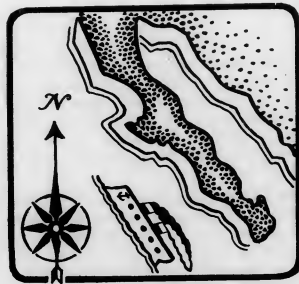
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MEXICAN DEPARTMENT OF PRESS AND PUBLICITY

GABINO VAZQUEZ

THE AGRARIAN
REFORM
IN
LOWER CALIFORNIA



D • A • P • P

THE AGRARIAN
REFORM

LOWER CALIFORNIA

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SYNTHESIS OF THE AGRARIAN MEASURES TAKEN BY
THE PRESIDENT OF THE REPUBLIC, GENERAL OF
DIVISION LAZARO CARDENAS, IN THE NORTHERN
TERRITORY OF LOWER CALIFORNIA.

The Mexican Department of Press and Publicity, which sponsors this important series of lectures broadcasted by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, has kindly invited me to expound in broad lines, the agrarian measures, which the President of the Republic, General of Division Lázaro Cárdenas, has taken in the Northern Territory of Lower California, in compliance with the Law and as a substantial part of a broad policy for reorganizing the economic and social conditions, prevailing in this distant peninsular section of our country's territory.

Taking into account the main purpose of this periodical broadcasting i. e. to strengthen always more closely the bonds of friendship which bring together the Mexican Government and foreign nations, I think it useful, before staking the main theme of my lecture, to sketch in a few words the general conditions which the Government wishes to modify and the most striking aspects of its general action, which tends to develop along wholly harmonious lines.

I wish to state, on the other hand, that the changes which the regime of rural property should undergo by way of the Agrarian Reform, can only be understood in all their transcendental historical meaning, if one looks at them as a base for the substantial transformation through which Mexico's revolutionary movement intends to recover in a short time, the backwardness of several centuries.

In the case of Lower California, the enforcement of the Agrarian Laws has a paramount meaning, for other special reasons. It belongs to the great recovery program which the President of the Republic is promoting in order to strengthen racial community,

cultural solidarity and economic intercourse between these distant territories and the rest of the Republic, so as to make them form an integral portion of our Nationality.

To regulate land tenure is to commence transforming the existing conditions "with the essential facts of its economy"; it is the first condition necessary "to obtain a more numerous Mexican population in this peninsula, to give it a more efficient protection and to incorporate it in the economic and social life of our Nationality, preserving and strengthening the characteristic features of our own culture, instead of continuing to struggle unsuccessfully as it does now, against the unfavorable conditions created in the border zone by the proximity of more improved foreign economic systems".

The Northern portion of Lower California is dominated by a few large landed estates, all of them identified in a single one. Those who have monopolized land and water property have always followed the tactics of the great landlords, i. e. to prevent the population from becoming economically strong and independent, creating an intermediate class of tenants subjected to their will, who contribute with all their efforts to defend the private interests of their lord.

The class consciousness of the small tenants, who should take sides with the ejido peasants, since both groups are specifically protected by the Constitution, was in a certain way appealed to by the great landlords. Their policy consisted in making the small tenants feel inclined to support the interests of the large estates, creating a dangerous misconception in one of the factors of production, which constitutes with the ejidos the twofold sustenance of the new economic rural policy of Mexico.

This previous explanation was necessary to understand the meaning of the movement promoted by the great landowners to mislead public opinion about the agrarian reform in this territory.

The rural people, devoid of land in a district where there is sufficient of it to meet their needs, even if it were more densely populated, took advantage of the President's message in which the economic and rational improvement of the Territories is fostered, to insist vigorously on the donation of ejidos. Some of the applicants had suffered, not long ago, reclusion in the penal colony

of Islas Marias for having urged the enforcement of the agrarian laws in the Northern Territory of Lower California.

These peasants are particularly well prepared for tilling the soil, they are perfectly trained, have a great sense of responsibility and are hardened by a continuous struggle to subdue an arid hostile country. This is an excellent human factor, that never attained to the possession of the land and could never get hold of the means of making it afford welfare for themselves, who fertilize it with their efforts and their pains.

As regards the working conditions which existed in the North of Lower California, these were more unfavorable to the laborer than those which prevailed in the Laguna District before the Agrarian Reform was introduced. In this district it was possible to eliminate for the first time the long standing economic conflict between the ejido and the large estate, in order to establish the two exclusive land regimes guaranteed by the Mexican Revolution: the ejido and the small farms.

First of all it should be known that President Cárdenas has followed a very praiseworthy policy of depuration imposing a severe corrective to the officials, who had misinterpreted his intentions and baffled the rules of strict probity which he has established in public life. In this manner the program of the President for incorporating the territories in the national body, could be carried out with the full cooperation of the civil authorities and the military chiefs, to whose sense of duty and revolutionary righteousness may be ascribed a great part of the success of the enterprise, which I will further try to summarize.

In his message for the recovery of the Territories, the President of the Republic advised the Agrarian Department of the necessity "of increasing the number of commissions set up for fixing the land endowments and restitute lands and water" in this section of the country, giving course in this way to the claims of the peasants of Lower California and Quintana Roo, who formerly had been applying for ejidos. Afterwards, on March 14 of the present year, he issued a decree from the city of Oaxaca, whereby the prompt resolution and due consideration to the applications for land distribution in the Northern and Southern Territory of Lower California was ordained.

In short, this decree recognized qualifications for exercising agrarian rights, to all the groups of population, which existed before the colonization charter issued in April, 1936, by which the Department of Agriculture authorized a concern owning large estates, to divide and sell all their land to Mexican peasants on a plan of colonization. The decree stated the existence of large areas that would be sufficient to meet all the applications for assignment of lands excluding from distribution the small farms not exceeding one hundred and fifty hectares of irrigated land or its equivalent, provided that the owners had their property titles duly booked on the Register of Real Estate. It protected consequently the farmers who bought their land within the limits hereabove stated. It assigned for ejidos the best lands available and provided allotment of the exceeding areas with a view of promoting further colonization. It established the relations between natural conditions of soil and climate and the resources necessary for sustaining a family of farmers, as a means of fixing the extent of the areas to be endowed. Finally it was ordained that in agrarian matters, all the legal dispositions should be strictly observed, so that the peasants might claim the rights which the laws concede to them.

As may be noticed, the decree intends to safeguard firmly the two regimes of property established by art. 27 of our Political Constitution: the ejido and the small rural property, actually under cultivation; the latter has been defined with uttermost liberality, following the precedent established in the resolution of the agrarian problem of the Laguna District. As to the large estates, they were treated in the same manner as the others that were affected throughout the Republic, and this is only fair and lawful.

Faithful to his purpose of attending personally the solution of the national problems or delegating the chiefs of the official Departments to settle things directly on the spot, the President of the Republic ordered that I was to go to the Northern Territory of Lower California, in my capacity of Head of the Agrarian Department, in order to carry out his respectable provisions and enforce the law with utmost consideration for the interests of the rural masses.

All applications for land allotments were given consideration within the legal terms, strictly following the usual proceedings

on the matter. But no sooner were the first cases settled, there arose an antagonical current against our work. This movement was instigated by the big land owners, who misled the small owners, tenants and settlers, using them as an instrument for spreading alarming news, in spite of the ample protection which the presidential decree conceded to their lawful rights.

For this agitation campaign the usual means were put forth: parades, obstruction of public places by groups of petitioners, press and radio campaign, and finally many requests that contained mostly erroneous statements and brought forth certain particular cases which inevitably always arise when a landholding regime is changed. In these requests the withdrawal of the Mixed Agrarian Commission was solicited, although this Commission was working very efficiently, carrying the President's instructions with strictly legal criterion: they argued that the new regime would very badly affect the small tenants, who would lose their money and their efforts; they stated exaggerated figures to augur an economic catastrophe; they claimed inaffectability of lands which fell under the law of endowments and they asserted—as had been equally asserted before in the Laguna District—that the National Bank of Ejido Credit would not be able to give the necessary service to the ejidos and finally that it would be impossible to sow in due time to raise normal crops.

The President of the Republic destroyed the basic objections, issuing, on April 3, new instructions from Acapulco, State of Puebla, where he was staying at the time, on an official tour. Here it was ordained that the tenures, affectable according to the law of endowments, could be immediately distributed, but that the crops should be previously raised according to legal provisions, by those who had done the sowing and cultivation. The National Bank of Ejido Credit was instructed to operate with all the financial concerns, which were in conditions to give service during the present land tilling, and operate with the others for the next period.

The figures and facts which I will further mention, demonstrate how groundless were their fears and how erroneous the arguments brought forth by the group that was manoeuvred by the big estate owners.

As to the Mixed Agrarian Commission, the President affirmed

his agrarian policy by trusting to it, as before, the management of the ejido distribution and approving all its steps.

But as the agitation did not cease, it was necessary for the Head of the Agrarian Department to make a second visit to the Territory of Lower California, with instructions from the higher authorities to enforce the presidential decree above mentioned, as well as the ordinance of April 30, which confirmed the inviolability of the small rural property, advising expressly that the ejidos should be located outside the area, actually cultivated by colonization contracts, and charging the Agency of the National Bank of Ejido Credit to pay compensations for work and investments, authorized to the former landowners of the affected areas, in such cases as they had made arrangements and contracts with the peasants. To all those who had sown crops, the necessary time was conceded to raise the harvest before the ejido peasants were allowed to take possession of the land.

On this occasion the Federal Executive showed its respectfulness for the small rural property actually under cultivation, and considering the information forwarded by the Department of Agriculture, ordained to respect the rights of 192 settlers, who work a total area of 11,452 hectares, 6 ares.

The President concluded stating: "the Executive Power vested in me reiterates its sincere desire that the entire population of the Territory should be aware that the Federal Government is anxious to settle the agrarian problem, which not only concerns this Territory but the whole Nation, in accordance with the Law and respectful of its dispositions. Care is taken at the same time of the farmers not concerned with the ejidos. The Executive expects therefore all the inhabitants of the Peninsula to assume a patriotic attitude".

The ejido peasants have always demonstrated their willingness to fulfil legal provisions and presidential ordinances.

The final attitude of the settlers, tenants and small farmers of the Valley of Mexicali proved also to be patriotic and praiseworthy. They abandoned their former hostility, when they realized their mistake. Officials of the Agrarian Department, of the Department of Agriculture, of the local government, of the National Bank of Ejido Credit, as well as schoolteachers whose activity had been blamed as vexatious and unjust—all went to the fields and

explained plainly the assurances which the President of the Republic was giving to protect every respectable right.

Afterwards, on May 10 and 11, the officials held a meeting with the representatives of the settlers, the tenants and small farmers, in which were also present the commissioners of the ejidos and the League of Agrarian Communities, and here each of the social groups represented had the opportunity to expound its particular viewpoints on the matter.

At the same time the answer of the Head of the Agrarian Department to the petition of the settlers and small farmers was published. Here each point was analyzed in connection with the ordinances and the decrees, to which I have already alluded, exposing the truth about the erroneous statements made by the petitioners.

For the purpose of the present lecture, it will suffice to state that this study, formed with statistical data and documents in the case, and published under the title of "Algunos Aspectos del Problema Agrario en el Territorio Norte de la Baja California"—(Some aspects of the Agrarian Problem in the Northern Territory of Lower California)—, served to conciliate the apparent differences which existed between the groups and changed the former inconformity of the settlers and small farmers into demonstrations of full confidence in the righteousness of President Cárdenas and in support of his Government. This was helped not only by the arguments expressed in the above mentioned publication, but also by the broadminded discussions which led to settle the methods for paying compensations and indemnities for agricultural implements, the valuation of the products and time given for raising the crops.

A still better idea of the efficient agrarian work carried out in the Northern Territory of Lower California by the President of the Republic, may be had by taking into account the statistical data that follow.

Up to the fifth of June 38 ejidos were assigned in the Valley of Mexicali, of which 18 belong to provisional grants and 20 to final holdings, covering a total area of 97,121 hectares, taken by legal action from five large estates. By that date there remained two agrarian cases to be settled by the Governor and seven by the Mixed Agrarian Commission. These endowments favored 4,389

all of them heads of a family and the few ejidos which should still peasants, be granted, will benefit some 588 peasants more.

The Tijuana delegation had four cases pending and that of Ensenada two.

The National Bank of Ejido Credit —according to official data existing in the institution— had granted up to May 28 long-term loans for \$ 590,385.47 pesos and short-term loans for \$ 312,303.15 pesos totalling \$ 902,688.62 pesos.

The payments to be made in the months of June, July and August, until harvest time, are estimated in \$ 588,240.00 pesos of which \$ 302,040.00 pesos will be spent in advance money on 1,678 ejido peasants; \$ 64,260.00 pesos on mule forage; \$ 215,920.00 pesos on water supply for irrigation of 10,796 hectares. Other funds will be invested in purchasing machinery, mules and equipment; but it is estimated that the total sum of long-term credits will not exceed 2 million pesos.

The number of hectares planted with cotton on ejido fields, amounts to 10,796, on which 387 tons of seeds were used. (The other portion of the ejido land was already almost entirely planted when ejido endowments were made and terms were conceded to the owners to raise the crops.) About the end of May, germination in sown fields had begun in 80% of the total extension and prospects looked good.

As sowings had been made rather late in 40% of the fields, estimates of the harvest were drawn up in a very conservative way, but due to the absence of hailstorms, absence of pests and plenty of water, these estimates will surely prove low. It is expected that a minimum of five and a half hundredweight of cotton will be harvested per hectare, i. e. 11,786 bales of 230 Kgrs. each.

Money has been saved in the purchase of draught animals; a service of provision stores has been rapidly organized; the peasants were offered the benefit of purchasing merchandise at wholesale prices, in the village stores and shops. In this way \$ 182,000.00 pesos will be saved up to next December; all the purchases of implements were made directly by the credit societies, who first study prices, discuss brands and sign personally their orders. The agrarian officials and the National Bank of Ejido Credit have limited their action to give advice and serve the interests of the peasants.

Due to the training of the peasants of this region it will be

easy to have each ejido promptly organized into an independent responsible body, capable of solving its own internal affairs. The preparedness of the peasants of Lower California is sufficiently proved by the fact that, while in the Laguna District the Bank had to appoint and support the expenditure of foremen and assistants of the chiefs of the zones, in the Northern District of Lower California, these posts of foremen and assistants were occupied by the members of the ejidos, without special expenditure and it was not even necessary to appoint motor drivers or mechanics, because all the ejido communities have at command this type of qualified workmen.

The peasants have also contributed to the Society of Ejido Credit to which they belong with some property of their own, in order to increase their collective means of social and economic progress.

The small areas which it was not possible for the present to put under cotton cultivation and those —even smaller— which remained fallow, will be used for summer crops and winter plantation selecting the crops which will give the best results and highest profits according to climate conditions.

Social and educational action is given special attention, as it is realized that land and credit alone are not sufficient to transform the rural economy of an agricultural district.

Some model ejidos have been constituted; the Governor of the Territory has organized the House of the Ejido Peasants, attended in its social action by officials of the Agrarian Department Delegation and of the Mixed Agrarian Commission; to each ejido has been put the name of one of the Federal States, and the schools receive names of eminent persons, towns or slogans connected with this State; the walls of the schools are likewise ornamented with typical scenes of the State under whose patronage the ejido has been put and, if possible, the schoolmaster should be native of the same State.

Through this system two aims are kept in view: to strengthen the spiritual solidarity between the ejido peasants of the Northern Territory of Lower California and the rest of the country, as is the purpose of the President, and secondly, to place the ejido under the protection of the authorities of each State of the Republic, in order to secure their cooperation for improving the school, for

obtaining drinkable water supply and introducing little by little all the other public services.

Feminine Leagues for Social Action are now being successfully organized in the Northern Territory of Lower California. The functions of rural women in community life have been clearly put forth by the President, with a view of moralization, reduction of vicious customs, better management of domestic economy, improvement of the schools and thorough collaboration with the ejido peasants. The efforts of the Agrarian Officials and of the schoolmasters are focused towards the realization of this plan.

All the Departments of the Federal Executive are supporting the program in favor of the Territory, which was proclaimed to the Nation on September 28, 1936.

The Department of Communications and Public Works is actively pushing the works of the railroads that will connect Lower California with the rest of the Republic, without leaving the national territory; it is furthermore promoting the construction and improvement of the local highways.

The Department of Public Education supplies schoolmasters for the ejido schools and opens more schools where it be necessary.

The Department of National Defense sees to the safety and protection of the Institutions; the Commanders, Officers and troops, that are presently detached in the Territory, not only safeguard the population but also cooperate in carrying on material improvements and public works.

The introduction of drinkable water, in charge of the Health Department, will soon be a reality, thanks to the projects that have been worked out for the districts of Mexicali, Tijuana and Tocate.

In the same manner all the official bodies of the Federal Executive are cooperating in this noble scheme of recovery.

The Governor of the Territory has proved to be a faithful interpreter of the President's views in all the measures which he ordained with regards to the Agrarian Problem. He is an honorable officer, eager to enforce the legal prescriptions and a sincere revolutionist, who wishes to discharge his duty with the peasants.

In the same way as some landowners of the Laguna District have offered *motu proprio* their lands to the agrarian authorities for making easier the endowments, it is no more than right to recognize that some private concerns in the Valley of Mexicali

spontaneously put in the hands of the Commission portions of land to meet the ejido needs. Likewise have there been other concerns that continued to finance their former settlers or tenants after they had been turned into ejido peasants and this proves their confidence in the policy which is put forth by President Cárdenas.

Before concluding this report, a word should be said about the native tribes. In the Northern Territory of Lower California live two ethnic families: the Cucapús and the Huaypay. The former, when subdued were more than 10,000 in number, but are now reduced to about 200 families. The latter are almost completely extinguished.

The constant policy of the large estates has been to oppose the economic and social improvement of the Cucapús tribe. Forced back to the mountains they became a group of woodcutters, composed of strong individuals, who lived a miserable life and were given to the deprivations which always exist in an economic system which aims to ruin vital strength.

Private concerns bought the wood from the Cucapús for \$ 0.80 a "cuerda", the sales price being six times as much in the neighboring markets, and instead of paying them cash, they gave them strong drinks, victuals and a few garments.

In the new regime, the Cucapús have received their ejido, which bears the name of the tribe; the Governor of the Territory has taken provisions to build houses for them; the streets have been given names of the different aboriginal tribes of the country and the field work of these Indians is giving evidence of their striking ability for cultivating the soil and their capacity for becoming a prosperous agricultural people, working with modern methods.

The spirit of austerity and the strictness in keeping their word of honor is so great among the Cucapús, that when the National Bank of Ejido Credit sent them victuals for subsisting meanwhile they could commence tilling the land, they did not touch them, because they had been told, as a slogan, that "he who does not work has no right to eat" —and as the work on the land had not started, they thought it righteous not to take advantage of this food. It was necessary to explain to them the broader meaning of this revolutionary maxim, to make them accept the provenders before the tilling could begin.

Women and the young element are expected to be important factors in the improvement of the Northern Territory of Lower California, whose new rural regime gives hopeful prospects. As regards international relations—which is the theme of these lectures—they will doubtless be improved with the creation of a rich and more densely populated district, where economic values are not monopolized by a few large owners, but where riches is evenly distributed among all those who produce it.

The maintenance of the rules of equity and the observance of the Law without distinctions, both principles that have been the backbone of the Agrarian Work carried out by the President of the Republic, are a safeguard for all the owners, equally nationals or foreigners, as well as a security for the ejido peasants and small owners of plots actually under cultivation.

The great bulk of the producing population of two friendly nations, who are guided in the present historic hour, by statesmen, who open broad perspectives to the ideals of the people, will come to mutual understanding and see with pleasure the progress of their parallel actions. Thanks to this mutual comprehension, the diplomatic relations—whose necessary condition is the true backing of the great masses—will be strengthened and will prove more efficient in the future.

Gabino Vázquez.



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